DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 653 CS 504 543

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TITLE Monitoring Student Listening Techniques: An Approach to Teaching the Foundations of a Skill.
PUB DATE 11 Mar 84
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (75th, Philadelphia, PA, March 8-11, 1984).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Design; Elementary Secondary Education; *Learning Strategies; Listening Comprehension; *Listening Habits; *Listening Skills; *Skill Development; Student Evaluation; Teaching Methods; *Units of Study

ABSTRACT

To teach listening as a discreet skill, teachers need a suitable definition of the word "skill." The author suggests defining a skill as a complex of techniques and behaviors from which performers select, depending upon the situation, to fullfill their purposes. The curricular design should be based on four components: (1) establishing attention, (2) identifying content, (3) selecting teaching and learning strategies, and (4) developing an effective evaluation process. After creating interest by showing connections between listening skills and student experience, teachers can present three basic content lessons: physical techniques, focusing on using the eyes, face, body, and mouth to intensify the listening act and correct wandering attention; attitude techniques, concentrating on helping students overcome negative attitudes toward listening; and cognitive techniques, stressing recognizing speakers' nonverbal cues and identifying important elements in the material heard. Teachers usually find lecture the most effective method of communicating listening skill information and they may reinforce and evaluate student listening techniques through quizzes and performance monitoring. When monitoring, teachers need to make clear that students' listening performance is being rated for each class. Teachers can use these skills to help students change from passive to active listeners. (A syllabus, student report forms, and a selected bibliography are appended.) (MM)

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MONITORING STUDENT LISTENING TECHNIQUES: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING THE FOUNDATIONS OF A SKILL

by

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"TEACHING LISTENING"

Eastern Communication Association
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
March 11, 1984

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Students must learn to listen if they are expected to listen to learn. Teachers cannot assume that students just "naturally" know how to listen. Teachers need to provide some concrete instruction in how to listen--lessons which go beyond "shut up and listen". This paper examines the formative status of listening instruction in education, proposes a definition for the term "skill", presents some foundational listening techniques, and introduces a system for monitoring student listening. When students are expected to listen to learn, each teacher must be certain that those students have learned to listen.

While human beings have been listening to each other for many thousands of years, the idea of teaching listening as a discrete subject is relatively new. The concept of listening instruction is still in an embryonic stage. Listening is so new to the professionals who study and teach speech communication that listening is usually relegated to the last morning of speech conventions--the time of the true fanatics. Most of the published material on listening and listening instruction is less than a decade old. Thus, the idea of listening as a learned and teachable subject within the education curriculum is not yet universally accepted.

As a matter of fact, the concept of listening as a separate basic skill has evolved only within the past six years. In 1978, Congress established a legal definition for the basic skills. This law defined the basic skills as including "effective oral communication."[1] (Since

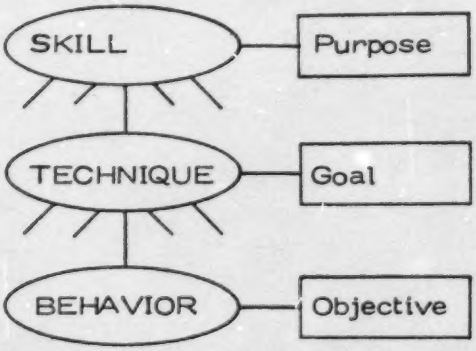
oral communication is a process, speaking and listening have been identified as the basic skills in that process). In 1983, three national-level documents on educational policy[2] all identified one of the basic skills in education as listening. An informal survey by the Task Force for Assessment and Testing of the Speech Communication Association (reported at the 1982 national convention) discovered that at least 37 states will be requiring speaking and listening instruction by 1985. Thus, the concept of listening in education is spreading from the top downward.

Since listening has made its appearance on the academic scene, teachers are choosing, or being required, to teach this new subject. The academic policy statements mentioned above assume that speaking and listening skills will be taught by English teachers. However, most English teachers have had nothing more than one college speech class which leaves them unprepared to teach either speaking or listening. Actually, listening is so "new" that even relatively few speech teachers have any training in that subject. Thus, teachers who choose, or are assigned, to teach listening have no tradition or model of instruction from which to draw.

Basically, there are two ways to approach the teaching of listening. One approach is to teach <u>about</u> the human activity called "listening" -- by focusing on theory. The second approach is to teach the skill of listening -- by focusing on the practice of behaviors and techniques which make a listener more effective. This paper presents a rationale for teaching the foundations of the skill of listening.

Since the concept of a "skill" tends to be clouded by a variety of uses and meanings, the first problem of the teacher is to establish a clear idea and definition of a "skill". The definition of a skill suggests instructional possibilities not available through any of the many technical definitions of listening. While some writers suggest that listening consists of a variety of skills, this writer prefers a concept of skill as a complex of techniques and behaviors from which the performer selects, dependent upon the situation, to fulfill his or her purpose. As such, the concept of "skill" can be modeled as in Figure #1.

FIGURE #1: A CONCEPT OF "SKILL"



Behaviors are specific actions undertaken by an individual to achieve a specific objective. A variety of behaviors can be arranged in a pattern known as a technique: that technique is intended to achieve a goal more complex than the behavior's objective. Finally, a skill is a collection of techniques and behaviors used to achieve a general purpose whether that skill is listening or quarterbacking a football team.

A curricular design is needed once the teacher has established his or her approach to the subject. The curricular design for this course is

based on four components --establishing attention and interest, identifying content, selecting appropriate teaching/learning strategies, and developing an effective evaluation process.

ESTABLISHING ATTENTION AND INTEREST:

A teacher cannot assume student interest merely because those students appear in the classroom. Consequently, the first search of the teacher is to find an angle, a perspective, which will catch the students' attention and interest. Catching student attention and interest requires establishing as many connections with the students' experience as possible.

Since pupils must listen in the classroom, teaching them to listen as students provides a concrete and immediate application of that skill. Surveys reveal that students listen ranging from 36% of elementary classtime to 96% of secondary English classtime.[3] Yet, rarely are students given instruction in how to listen: most listening lessons are restricted to "shut up and listen" or "you're not listening" or "now, listen carefully". Most students can list assignments, and even classes, for which they received poor grades simply because they did not listen. A unit built on the proposition that STUDENTS WHO GET GOOD GRADES ARE NOT SMARTER, THEY LISTEN BETTER appeals to their immediate concrete needs. Few students can resist discovering an easier way to improve their grades.

IDENTIFYING CONTENT:

The content of a listening skill course must focus on what the students need do, in concrete terms, in order to listen more effectively in

the classroom. Three foundational content lessons, summarized below, are presented to the students.

LESSON ONE: PHYSICAL TECHNIQUES:

The first listening lesson is about "acting like" a good listener/student. Many sources in listening state that when you "act like" an effective listener, your listening tends to improve. Likewise, many sources exhort us to be an "active listener", which creates an image of a listener with St. Vitus' Dance. Usually those two general descriptions are kept in generalized or abstract terms which makes the student functioning in a more concrete state, wonder how the effective listener does act.

Four physical techniques form the foundation for active listening. These four techniques focus on the eyes, the face, the body, and the mouth. Each technique area must give the student concrete actions without creating automotons.

As the first physical listening technique, the eyes must be active. The average person (except those with hard contact lenses) blinks at a rate of 15-20 blinks per minute. When the listener's blink rate drops below 15-20 blinks per minute, the odds are that that person's mind is no longer on the speaker. If a person stares straight ahead without blinking, invariably that person's mind will be lost in space, daydreaming. Not only do listeners need to be aware of their blink rate, but they must also keep their eyes moving, surveying the speaker for nonverbal cues as well as checking the environment immediately surrounding

the speaker.[4] The activity of the listener's eyes tends to reveal the focus of the mind.

The second physical technique of effective listening involves the use of the face. Most students have learned to hide themselves behind a neutral mask so nobody knows how they are responding. Without facial responses, the speaker has no way to determine the effect of the message. By contrast, the effective listener's face reveals how he or she is responding to the speaker's message.

While most students have learned to hide in the class, the effective student-listener demands to be noticed by responding clearly to the teacher. The effective student-listener makes certain that the teacher sees that he or she is listening by making his or her face react to the message in large and clear responses--thoughtfulness, puzzelment, discovery, delight--as appropriate. The student's attitude must not be one of fear, but a demand to be seen and to know.[5]

A third physical listening technique involves the listener's use of the body. Listening requires that the listener is physically prepared.[6] Listening takes energy and requires stamina. Listening is not a passive act. The listener's body must move and respond to the speaker. If the listener is rigid and unmoving, that person is most likely not listening. The listener cannot remain immobile, or in a supine position, for long without loosing track of the speaker. Listeners need to maintain an upright position. Leaning forward slightly inclines the listener to the speaker--physically and mentally. Similarily, a listener's regularly nodding head, in all liklihood, indicates he is nodding off to sleep. Thus,

the listener must be aware of his or her body and use it to intensify the listening act.

The effective listener also can use his or her body to correct wandering attention. Sustaining concentration is perhaps the most difficult behavior involved in listening. When the listener realizes that his or her mind has wandered from its task, he or she can use a deliberate body shift as a cue to refocus attention on the speaker.

The last physical listening technique focuses on the mouth. Most students and teachers assume that they are listening best when they are silent: they remember that basic listening lesson, "shut up and listen" from many sources. Effective students, however, do need to use their mouth when it is appropriate.

There are two ways that effective listeners use their mouths. First, the listener can use vocalics—that is, meaningful sounds such as "huh", "oh", "ah"! Laughter at appropriate points is a part of the listener's vocalic technique. (Sometimes the student might even use vocalics to let the teacher know he or she is listening, if the teacher is not looking around.) The second mouth technique is asking questions or making statements in response to the speaker.[7] Sometimes the listener must verbalize his or her response to the speaker's message. Students must be advised that they must learn to distinguished between teachers who will accept verbalized responses and teachers who will not accept such verbalized responses.

LESSON TWO: ATTITUDE TECHNIQUES:

A second lesson in "acting like" a good listener/student is based on attitude. Many students assume that their own attitude is beyond their control. Student-listeners need to discover how their attitude affects their listening ability and how they can determine their own attitude.

Ralph G. Nichols, the "father" of listening, identified one of the common listening barriers as an attitude in which the subject, or any subject, is boring.[8] An uninterested or bored attitude serves only to impede communication.

A positive listening attitude recommended to counter boredom is to become selfish. The effective listener approaches each situation with a selfish attitude of "what's in this for me?" or "there has to be something of value here for me". Such a positive attitude serves as a motivation for the listener to search each message for meaning and value.

Two surveys can be used to make the students aware of their negative attitude. This survey asks for a report of a situation in which the listener failed to listen because they were "bored", and a situation in which positive, or selfish, listening benefited them. Each student is required to turn in, at least one of these single-paged reports (See Apperdices 2) each week. The purpose of the reports is to reinforce the student's awareness of the selfish listening attitude.

Avoidance of difficult materials is a second barrier to effective listening which is created by attitude.[9] Fear of the unknown and the natural inclination to avoid hard work cause most people to resist complex

messages. Since the pattern of avoidance is habitual, the teacher's problem is to create a positive condition for listening to difficult materials. A weekly report on some effort to listen to difficult material (See Appendix 3) can serve as the necessary motivation for the student. Sustaining a series of weekly reports may contribute to establishing a positive listening attitude.

LESSON THREE: COGNITIVE TECHNIQUES:

The third lesson for the student-listener is a cognitive technique in which the listener identifies non-verbal cues.[10] Most teachers develop some kind of non-verbal systems by which they cue the student-listener to the relative importance of information. Many students do poorly simply because they are not aware of the teacher's cueing system. Whether the teacher uses the blackboard, repetition of content or themes, uses a particular gesture, uses a special vocal pattern, or uses a specific movement pattern, the student needs to identify what non-verbal cues are significant. One introduced to the idea of non-verbal cues, a periodic discussion about teaching cue systems discovered by the students helps them use their new technique.

Further cognitive technique lessons can be developed as classtime and interest permits. Cognitive techniques such as identifying subject, theme, purpose, organizational strategies, critical listening, directive and non-directive listening, and using the thought-speech speed differential can be taught while reinforcing the foundational physical, attitude and cognitive techniques.

SELECTING APPROPRIATE TEACHING/LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Determining which teaching/learning strategies are most appropriate to the material depends on the teacher's range of instructional options and scope of knowledge. Lecture seems to be the most appropriate way to introduce the students to the new concept of listening. As one student observed "reading about listening is really weird."

Once the concepts of listening techniques have been presented, those concepts need to be reinforced until they become a habit. Reinforcement can be developed in two ways---by quizzes and by performance monitoring. The quizzes check the students' cognitive listening and retention. Continuing to check foundational techniques through quizzes for several weeks usually drills those concepts into the students' memory.

When the students begin to recognize the concept of listening techniques, they can apply the various techniques and understand that they are being rated every day. Daily performance ratings help break the bad habit of passive non-listening.

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE EVALUATION PROCESS:

Evaluation serves one of two functions. An evaluation can measure and indicate achievement--such as, a grade. Evaluation also can monitor and provide feedback about a student's performance.

Monitoring each student's physical listening technique performance during every class can be based on a simple rating system. The teacher should make certain that students are aware that their listening performance is being rated for each class. The rating system is as

follows:

0 = Absent
2 = Unresponsive: Active less than 25% of the time
3 = Occasionally active: Active from 25% to 50% of the time.
4 = Usually Active: Active from 50% to 75% of the time.
5 = Consistently Active: Active about 100% of the time.

This monitoring system provides a factor in determining the daily and overall grade level of each student's achievement.

The monitoring system has several disadvantages. First, the teacher must be able to identify every student by name, which grows more difficult as class sizes increase. Second, this monitoring system tends to be somewhat subjective. Finally, recording and providing feedback of student performance at the end of a class session can prove overwhelming.

Several advantages are found for a listening monitoring system. First, the daily rating can provide direct feedback by which the students can determine how to improve their performances. Second, the daily performance rating can contribute to the overall grade. Third, an unexpected benefit of this rating system is that it forces the teacher to be constantly checking every student. (This system makes the teacher aware of how he or she tends to pay considerable attention to some students and paying little attention to others.)

CONCLUSIONS:

Teaching listening as a discrete skill is a newly developing idea whose time is coming. If a teacher decides to teach listening as a skill, a clear concept of the nature of "skill" must be established. Any one of

the many technical definitions of listening as a phenomena will not work as a basis for an instructional plan.

Students who have been taught to listen effectively pose one danger for the teacher. Since most speakers do naturally work harder when they discover they have a responsive listener, the teacher is in danger of finding himself or herself working much harder for these delightfully responsive listeners.

Teaching students how to listen as students suggests an immediate application of that skill. Instruction in listening needs to be, as Piaget tells us, concrete. Establishing foundational listening techniques which cover the physical, the attitudinal, and the cognitive gives the students a set of performable actions. By presenting concrete performable techniques, the teacher can provide the students with the foundation for effective listening. Monitoring those techniques establishes a student focus which can change the inactivity of the passive non-listener. When students learn to listen, they will be able to listen to learn.

FOOTNOTES

1. Education Amendments of 1978. P.L. 95-561. 92 STAT 2201-2205.

2. (1) National Commission on Excellence in Education: A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, April, 1983.
(2) Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our School System. Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, June, 1983.
(3) The College Board. Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do. New York: The College Board, July, 1983.

3. Larry L. Barker: Listening Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971, p.4

4. Franklin H. Ernst, Jr.: Who's Listening? Vallejo, California: Addresso' set, 1973, pp. 26-27.

5. Franklin H. Ernst, Jr.: Outline of the Activity of Listening. Vallejo, California: Addresso' set, 1966, pp.5-8.

6. Ralph G. Nichols: Are You Listening? New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957, pp.36-37.

7. Barker, Op. Cit., p. 73.

8. Baxter and Corinne Greeting: How to Listen Assertively. New York: Monarch Press, 1976, p. 17.

9. Nichols, Op. Cit., pp. 108-109.

10. Ibid, p. 107

11. Geeting, Op. Cit., pp. 35-37.

APPENDIX 1.

SPEECH COMMUNICATION 103 LISTENING SKILL -------

SYLLABUS

OBJECTIVES: The student should be able to:

1. Demonstrate effective listening techniques.
2. Reveal cognitive knowledge of the dimensions of listening studied in this class.

TEXT:

Perceptive Listening by Wolff, Marsnik, Tracey & Nichols (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1983)

ABSENCE POLICY:

Each class session will award rating points for the student's listening behavior. The initial rating possible for each class will be 5 points, or a total of 75 points for the 15 class sessions this term. The total class ratings for the term will be multiplied by a number which will give the total class rating equal to at least 50% of the total class points available. There can be no make-up of the class rating for any absence.

Class Rating Score	50%
Tests, Exercises & other services	50%
	100% Final Score

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION ARE THE KEYS TO PASSING THIS COURSE:

The daily class rating scale will be on a 5 point scale:

5 pts. = responsive listener: active about 100% of the time
4 pts. = partially responsive listener: active from 50% to 75% of time.
3 pts. = partially unresponsive listener: active from 25% to 50% of time.
2 pts. = unresponsive listener: active less than 25% of time.
0 pts. = absent

Daily quizzes and exercises will be scored as indicated at that time.

The total final score will depend upon the number of scored tests and exercises.

GRADES:

The final grade will be determined on a percentage of the students total final score as follows:

100%	- 90%	=	A
89%	- 80%	=	B
79%	- 70%	=	C
69%	- 60%	=	D
BELOW	59%	=	F

APPENDIX 2.

SPEECH COMMUNICATION 103 LISTENING SKILL---------

SELFISH LISTENING REPORT

NAME: _____ DATE FOR REPORT: _____

Identify a listening situation in which you applied the principle of "Selfish Listening" (listening to get something for yourself:)

LOCATION: _____
DATE: _____
APPROXIMATE TIME: _____
SITUATION: _____

_____

_____

RESULTS OF SELFISH LISTENING: _____

_____

Identify a listening situation in which you failed to apply the principles of "Selfish Listening":

LOCATION: _____
DATE: _____
APPROXIMATE TIME: _____
SITUATION: _____

_____

_____

RESULTS OF NOT LISTENING SELFISHLY: _____

_____

APPENDIX 3.

SPEECH COMMUNICATION 103: LISTENING SKILL

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

DIFFICULT LISTENING REVIEW

1. Source of listening: Lecture _____ TV _____ Radio _____

2. Name of speaker: _____

3. Title of presentation: _____

4. Date of Presentation: _____ Time: _____

5. Length of presentation: _____

6. What was the main idea of this presentation? _____

_____

_____

_____

7. What difficulties did you have in listening to this presentation? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. What new thing or things did you learn from this presentation? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

LISTENING

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STUDENTS WHO GET GOOD GRADES ARE NOT SMARTER, THEY LISTEN BETTER.

HOW CAN WE EXPECT OUR CHILDREN TO LEARN WHEN WE HAVEN'T TAUGHT THEM TO LISTEN ?